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NEWARK BEGINS REFURBISHING OF CITY HALL

Newark's City Hall, which has grown somewhat shabby through the years, is about to receive a full-scale rehabilitation.

Scaffolding has already been erected in the rotunda of the five-story building to prepare for the painting and cleaning of all interior public spaces, including the dome, the adjoining open courts, and the corridors.

Officials say some of the areas have not been redecorated in 25 years. They hope the new color scheme will enhance the basic beauty of the 60-year-old structure.

In addition, the four elevators in the building will be rebuilt; leaking portions of the roof and dome will be repaired, and the lighting system will be overhauled.

Plans call also for the development of new meeting and exhibition areas in the building's two "wells" - open courts that extend from the second floor to the skylights. Temporary offices now located in one of these wells will be moved elsewhere in the building.

The work is tied in with a general rearrangement of municipal agencies during the last two years. Many offices have already been moved from City Hall to the Two Guys building and other downtown locations. City Hall is to remain the executive and ceremonial focus of the government, and will continue to house agencies that deal extensively with the public.

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The painting and cleaning are to be done by Advanced Coatings Co., Inc., of Orange, under a contract for \$69,000. The firm, lowest of three bidders, is expected to spend nine months on the job.

Most of the interior will be painted a bronze or butterscotch, considerably lighter than the present brick-red corridor walls. The ceiling will be blue, and a plain gray will be put over the many metal and plaster surfaces that were formerly treated to resemble marble.

Many of the simulated marble surfaces - which are developed by a process known as scagliola - are faded and discolored, and recreating them would be costly and time consuming. On the other hand, all authentic marble, natural woodwork, gold leaf and glass will be cleaned and repaired.

"It will be a new look," says Anthony Luppino, city architect. "It'll be cleaner and brighter. Esthetically, it will accentuate the true architectural value, as it was originally designed."

And Donald Meeker, a city management specialist who has helped develop the project, says: "We will be removing the phoniness to highlight what is there."

City Hall, which opened in 1906, was designed in the classic style and built at a cost of \$2 million. Luppino says it would cost \$75 to \$85 million to duplicate the structure today.

Alvin Zach, director of the Department of Engineering, says the repairs to the roof will be done simultaneously with the redecoration. Ceiling plaster has been badly damaged in recent years because of defects in the dome and the gutter system. Bids for the repairs, estimated at \$30,000, are due to be opened Friday (Feb. 6).

Zach said all the costs of the work are being paid through the city's capital budget, which is entirely separate from the operating budget.

The elevator work is being done by Higdon Elevator Co. of Hackensack on a contract for \$86,718. The elevators suffer frequent breakdowns, and recently three of the four were out of operation at one time. The contractor will install new cabs, which can be operated manually or automatically.

The Engineering Department is still developing plans for the lighting. The existing chandeliers on the first, second and third floors will be rehabilitated. The fluorescent fixtures on the fourth floor hallways will be replaced with chandeliers similar to those on the lower levels.

Officials say the well areas can be used, with a minimum of remodeling, for large gatherings or exhibitions. The wells might provide a setting for displays of sculpture, banners, tapestry, mobiles, and other art, Meeker said.

Agencies now using space in the south well - Rent Control, Consumer Action, demolition, and the municipal library - will be moved elsewhere in the building. In recent years several major departments, including Health and Welfare, Public Works, Recreation and Parks, and Finance, have moved to office buildings.

Meeker and Evelyn Simpson, a city designer, are also developing a new sign system for the interior of the building.

Luppino says all of the interior restoration should be completed in 1977. Some additional exterior work may be needed in the future to seal the stones and window frames, the architect added.